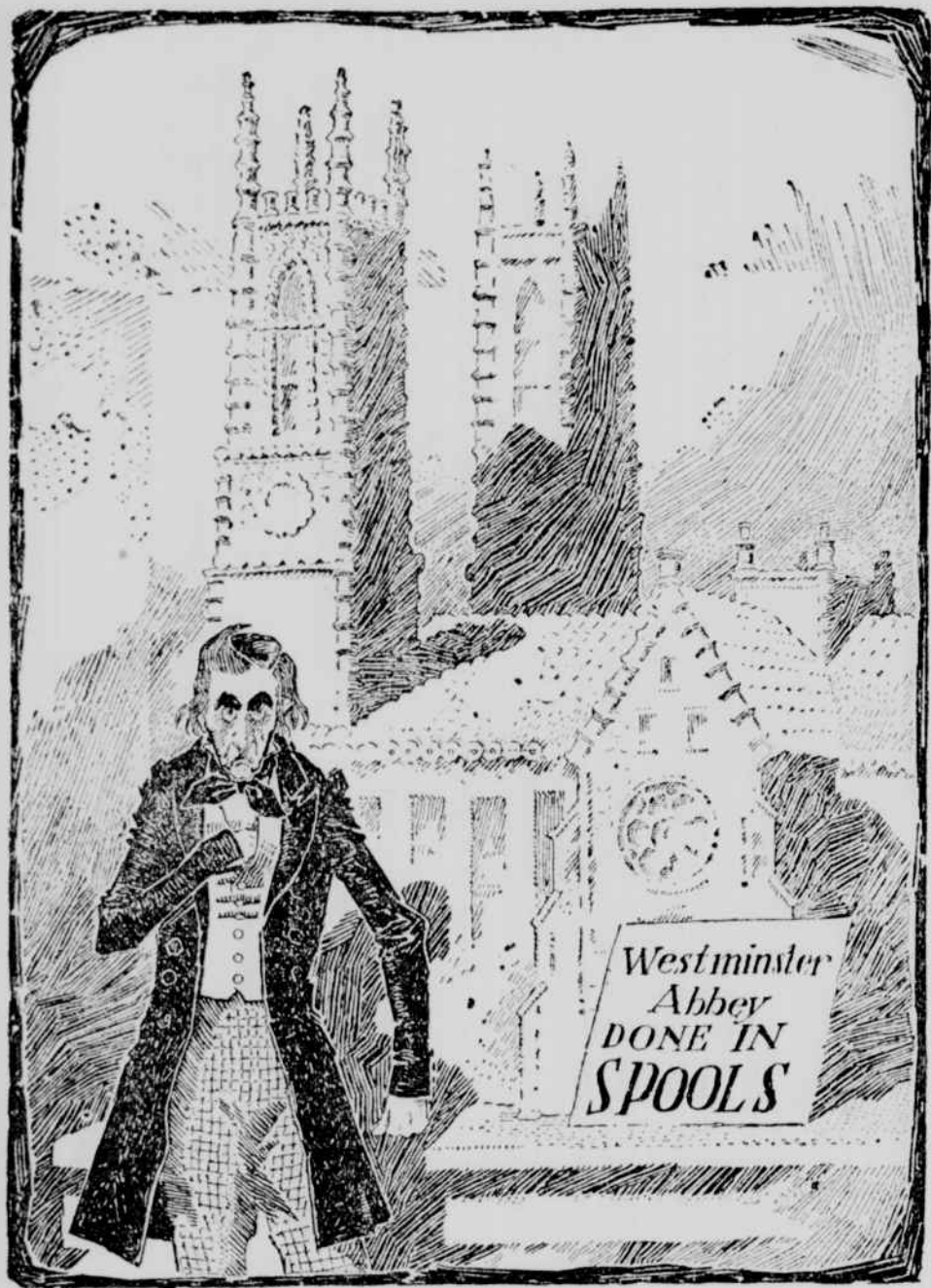


LET US NEXT CONSIDER THE DEADLY CURIOMANIA



With Glue and Spools This Man Erected in Six Years an Exact Model of Westminster Abbey. His Wife Eloped with a Neighbor. His Child Is in the Trenches.

NUMEROUS works are available on the legal and pathological aspects of insanity in its many phases, but we have yet to come upon a treatise dealing with that curious and limited group of demented whose aberration consists in discovering or constructing some useless article which for want of a better name is termed a "curio."

We refer to those persons who have cheerfully devoted their years to collecting matchboxes, hair-pins, tacks, shells, spools, buttons and other miscellaneous articles from which to construct miniature chicken-coops, candle-abres, battleships, sky-scrapers, etc.; or, lacking the fiendish ingenuity of their fellows, the poor wretches who spend days searching an old tree-stump which from certain angles bears a unique resemblance to the profile of George Washington; or the pitiful subject who has dedicated his life to carving a doll out of a cork which has been pushed thoughtlessly into a bottle.

One of the saddest concomitants to this mania seems to be what amounts to a craving for publicity. Indeed, several of our magazines, recognizing this weakness in the unfortunate, have devoted departments to their exploitation. Here, under the title of "Curios," or "Oddities," may be viewed the extent to which the victims are lost. An indistinct photograph reveals on close inspection the fact that it is a "watch chain fashioned from baby's teeth." In a short paragraph below a father writes that he "could not bear to lose his son's first teeth, with all their tender associations, so being possessed with some mechanical skill—he was a plumber by trade—he hit upon the idea of a watch chain." He feels it is only right to give this idea to other fond fathers who may also be downcast at a similar prospect.

As has been noted, authorities have strangely avoided the prolific field of research offered by the ravages of *curiomania*, and with the modest hope of adding something to this fund of ignorance, the writers have drawn from a lifetime of experience such cases as seem to them to bring light where now is only darkness.

In perusing these cases the reader has constantly to bear in mind that the purpose of this article is to get at the primal causes which so often and so suddenly bring about the overthrow of an apparently normal mind. There are cases to the number of thousands of men and women, medically sound, with a good history, who eat, sleep and toil with the regularity of health, and yet whose spare moments are dedicated with fanatical zeal to the maniacal pursuits in discussion.

Here lies the most insidious attribute of the disease. It is upon its victim before the symptoms are even suspected. Persons in the high tide of life, with every good thing in prospect, are suddenly seized. And what then is the melancholy progress of events? With science

looking on, yet powerless to aid, the poor creature is presently overwhelmed in the vortex of disaster.

What sort of mind has the man who suddenly ceases normal activities to erect a model of the Woolworth Building out of sugar lumps? What is his psychological development, and whence his mental impulses? These are the questions which are at the very basis of the matter, and in their consideration lie the solution and perhaps the remedy.

While the following cases are noted in the interest of professionals, it has not been our purpose to perplex the lay reader, so that needlessly technical phrases have been omitted. The material is guaranteed and is offered merely for what it is worth.

CASE I. In 1892 there was discovered in the home of a certain Miss N., up to that time considered normal, what appeared to be a dirty gray slipper. It was placed upon the mantelpiece, half-way between the hawthorn jar and the little Dresden shepherdess. Believing it to be some plaything of the dog, in some manner misplaced, Miss N.'s attention was called to the fact. "Rollo's favorite sneaker, indeed!" she cried, apparently excited to a high degree. "That slipper was made in Washington from cancelled thousand dollar bills! It's worth \$50,000—*theoretically!*" Later in the evening, when the slipper was secretly given to Rollo, Miss N. became greatly agitated, and mourned the loss of the article as severely as though it owned a value. She quieted down in the course of an hour, and was believed to be on the road to recovery.

The following week, however, she made a request for all cigarette boxes her observers might have. Upon inquiry, she replied innocently enough: "Oh, when I get enough I shall string them together to make a portiere." It was then seen that her case was hopeless. She died by her own hand at the age of twenty-three, having previously fashioned a casket from the extra leaves of the dining room table.

CASE II. Mr. B. was a hard working draper's clerk, having a wife and one child, both of whom he loved very much. It was only by continuous and conscientious work that he was able to keep them draped, he said. One day he felt an abnormal desire for old spools. He struggled hard, but the craving was not to be denied. He avoided his family in his leisure time in a mad quest for old spools. For the best part of six years he was occupied in amassing a tremendous store of them, each year his wife and child becoming more remote to him. At the end of that time, so far gone was his condition, that he took the money which should have gone toward the rent and purchased a pot of glue. With the glue and the spools he began painstakingly to erect an exact

Its Victims Make Battleships from Tacks, Chicken-Coops from Shells, Sky-Scrapers from Buttons. Sometimes, as a Reward, One of Them Receives a Year's Subscription to a Magazine

By F. C. SCHANG and H. W. HANEMANN
Illustrations by Will Crawford

model of Westminster Abbey. This task occupied six years more, during which he became an entire stranger to his wife and child.

As the result of this toil he sent a photograph of the finished product to a magazine, and received a year's subscription as a reward. His wife, distracted by indifference, eloped with a neighbor. The child is now somewhere in the trenches!

Further investigation reveals that the tragic result of Mr. B.'s first dementia have had no effect whatever on his disposition. Far from being depressed, he is now engaged in collecting sardine tins, from which he promises to fashion a *fac simile* of the Titanic, the great leviathan of the sea which met so untimely an end several years ago. Mr. B. appears to be sound, and his appetite is good. He wears a watch charm carved from a peach pit, which he made as a boy. This shows that the affliction may be hereditary. He was recently discharged from the draper's establishment for asking a customer to save sardine tins for him, and is now dependent on the kindness of neighbors.

CASE III. T. B. B. was a bright, healthy, normal girl of eighteen, with no visible signs of any disturbance. On her nineteenth birthday some well meaning friend presented her with a camera. She began, as she naturally would, snapping her friends, her dog, her room, etc. Presently she was no longer content to snap at these commonplace, and experienced a craving for snapping at all manner of weird and inexplicable objects. The following is a conversation between Miss B. and the photographer to whom she intrusted a roll of six exposures, as reported by a third party concealed behind the property automobile in the shop.

Photographer: "I'm very sorry, miss; but

of a belfry, looking up, taken while I was hanging by my legs from the balustrade. Isn't it unique?"

P.: "Oh!"

Miss B.: "This one I took from the train window, with the train travelling at full speed. It is the picture of the interior of a tunnel. Don't you think I've caught the spirit of the tunnel successfully?"

P.: "Oh!"

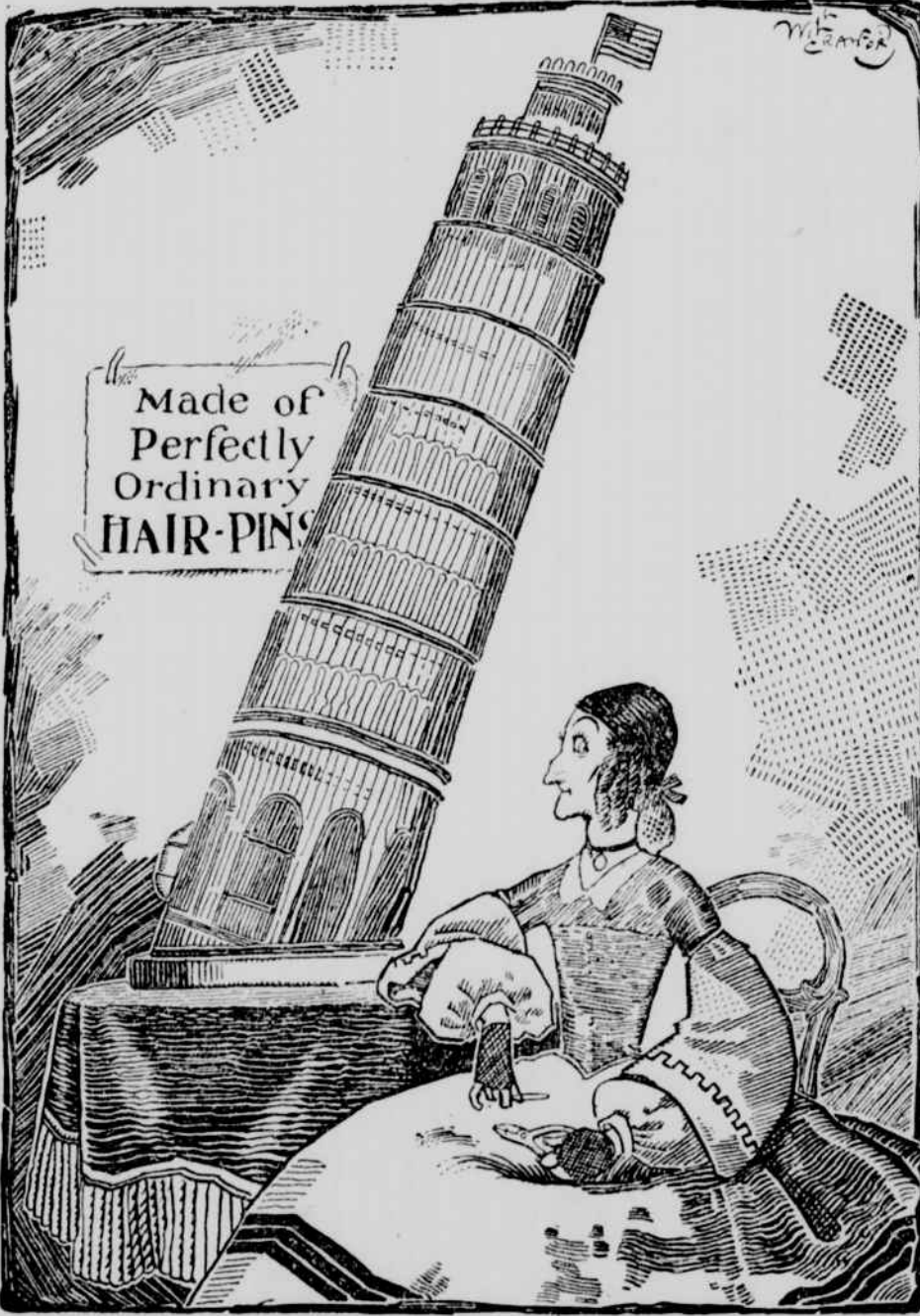
B.: "The rest are double exposures. In this one Aunt Marie seems to be emerging from the mouth of our pet cat. She really isn't, of course. Again I took Auntie snoring on the porch, with Jed, the farmhand, pitching hay. See, the pitchfork is right in Auntie's nose! Isn't it droll?"

This affair was duly gossiped around among the photographers in town, and they decided to boycott Miss B. in the interests of their business. Never having learned to do the work herself, the poor girl died of grief in the space of two years. She was found in her room surrounded by a vast quantity of exposed spools, which no one has as yet had the temerity to develop.

CASE IV. Sara M., an elderly lady verging on ninety, came to our attention in 1903. Without the aid of spectacles or glasses of any description, she arranged seashells into a floral piece, using the vari-colored skeletons of thousands of tiny mollusks to do so. The creation consisted of a large basket of flowers, flanked with her initials rampant, and supported on a piece of very bad poetry, which offered another evidence of the woman's state of mind.

Her family, principally to humor her, inclosed this bit of art work in a glass case, which was put on the parlor table of their home. In compliance with another whimsy of the old lady, they did the same to her, consigning her, however, to a more appropriate place.

CASE V. The following case has received wide publicity, and is, no doubt, as familiar to our readers as to ourselves. There is an en-



"In the course of nine years' rambling I have been happy in finding 321,007,649 hairpins of assorted shapes and sizes."

these don't seem to have come out very well."

Miss B.: "Why, they are perfectly splendid! How can you say that? They've come out beautifully."

P. (puzzled): "I don't understand—they seem rather confused—rather hodge-podge, miss. What's that, for instance?"

Miss B. (delighted at the encouragement): "Certainly! This is a picture of the interior

graver, at present residing at Cheapside, who at an early age showed a remarkable proclivity for engraving. At eight years his parents reported that he engraved his initials on the grand piano in a house at which they happened to be visiting. After that he rapidly became worse, going into fits if his engraving tools were taken from him. He seems to have calmed down somewhat upon adopting engraving as his trade. Two years ago, however, he startled the world by engraving the Lord's



Our Cow Daisy, When Hung Upside Down, Became a Lighthouse on a Stern and Rockbound Coast. The Advantage of Having a Wife with Not Too Artistic an Eye.

prayer on a pin head! He was apprehended, but undismayed by the confinement, is now engaged in writing the history of the world on the flat side of a toothpick.

CASE VI. An advertising manager of a certain match manufacturing concern conceived a plan whereby his product could be brought before the public in an insidious manner. He offered prizes for the most remarkable bits of craftsmanship which could be constructed, using his match box as the building unit.

There is no instance in the history of the disease which so admirably shows the widespread area of affliction. Thousands of the deluded flocked to the call, and the manufacturers were forced to engage space in a warehouse to accommodate the models which arrived by every parcel post and express delivery. It is sufficient for our purpose to mention only a few of the articles:

1. Upright piano. Full size, but with no strings, being therefore unplayable.
2. Laxey Wheel on Isle of Man. Curious, but indescribable device.
3. Forth Bridge. Evidently a bridge of some sort.
4. Bicycle. Model wholly impractical.
5. Nelson's ship Victory, passing lighthouse. Ingenious construction, riggings made of match sticks.
6. Ferris Wheel. Incapable of revolution.
7. Old Tower.

CASE VII. On his thirty-ninth birthday Captain J., of the Singapore Dragoons, discovered an old post in the barracks yards, the outlines of which resembled the profile of Queen Victoria. He dug the pole up in the dead of night, meaning to send it to "The Strand Magazine." Fortunately he was apprehended in the act, and immediately court-martialed. Later, travelling in Tibet, he came upon a great rock in the Himalayas resembling the Old Man of the Mountain. Subsequently he discovered an old iron stove bearing a likeness to Edgar Allan Poe, and a tree stump which recalls a Woman Combing Hair.

He is now a raving lunatic. It is unnecessary to continue further along this line to make a point which must now be apparent to the reader. Let us rather consider a few confessions from the subjects themselves. The individuals whose letters follow have written in total ignorance of their dangerous condition.

"When I travel, as I occasionally do, to and from places, it is my wont to look for and pick up stray hairpins which are often to be found on the public thoroughfares. In the course of nine years' rambling I have been happy in finding 321,007,649 hairpins of assorted shapes and sizes. In my spare time I have fashioned from them a bird cage the exact duplicate of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, though in wire, to be sure. I have gilded it, and have kept as many as ten birds in it at a time, which, unfortunately, have all died. Now I find it makes a very acceptable bassinet for our youngest child.

MRS. C. G. Y.—

"63 S. Islington Hill, N. W."
"This is a photo taken of me at B. As you see, the horse only has three legs! At the time of the picture we noticed the horse had four, as, indeed, he continued to have, in

all appearances, to the time of his death. "Whether in playfulness the horse concealed his fourth limb behind some other part of his anatomy, his ear, for instance, or whether he really had three and the human eye, accustomed as it is to seeing four, supplied the other. I cannot for the life of me decide. Too true is the saying 'The camera does not lie.' Can any of your readers solve this mystery?"

"MR. PHILIP M.—

"Toplington-on-Surrey, Leeds."
"Idly sketching one day in our back yard, I did a picture of our cow Daisy. In cleaning the mantelpiece of our little nest, wherein I placed the sketch, my wife, who I must confess is a better housewife than artist and does not possess too artistic an eye, through inadvertence placed the picture upside down. What was our surprise in looking at the picture thus placed to note that the erstwhile peaceful bovine had been transformed into a raging marine view! Her legs made excellent lighthouses, her body forms the dark, treacherous rocks, and the surrounding grass—it is for all the world like the wild water lashed by a furious wind.

"I hope, dear sir, that you are as pleased with my versatility as I am.

"KENNETH M'N—

"Bumpingham Spire, Spireton, Bumpingham." As we have endeavored to emphasize the great danger of the scourge lies in the complete ignorance of the victim. And there is a serious extenuating condition: any suggestion of his mental derangement to the unfortunate wretch would most certainly aggravate his affliction, and might even result in bodily harm to the physician.

At this early stage in the history of the disease no conclusions can be considered axiomatic. However, the student may note several general facts which successfully refute contradiction.

First, as an immediate precaution, let all curios extant be destroyed, even to the extent of confiscation. The Department of Weights and Measures is authorized to throw out eleven ounce pound weights and quart baskets holding three pints. Let another newer and no less efficient arm of the law ransack houses for worthless curios and pile them in the cart with the fraudulent weights. Art begs it and the public health demands it.

Secondly, let us have an exhaustive campaign for public education. By posters, pamphlets and press stories, let the public mind be educated to regard the makers of cigar-band ashtrays as dangerous lunatics, and let it be considered a disgrace to own a motor device constructed from watch works.

Thirdly, some scheme for placing the victims at large in confinement, or at least under observation, must be devised at once. We cannot risk the happiness of our wives and children by contact with these creatures.

Finally, the exploiters of these poor victims should be dealt with in a most drastic manner. They alone, by the sale of the vicious articles and by holding up the perpetrators to praise and esteem, do more evil than any other agent. Thanks to them, nearly 65 per cent of the nation's mantelpieces bear atrocious hand-painted clam shells. The explanatory labels, "In Memory of Killkare," in no way exonerate them. By deliberate encouragement they are sowing seeds which can only bloom to the degradation of our country.